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LA SOCIEDAD DE MENÉNDEZ Y PELAYO

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS OF SPANISH HISTORY AND LITERATURE

On August twentieth of this year a new society, founded in honor of the great critic and scholar, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, was formally inaugurated at Santander, his birthplace; it was there that he had spent the happiest years of his life in incessant labor, and by his last will and testament he bequeathed to the municipality of Santander his library of rare books, one of the foremost private collections in Spain. The building which formerly housed it has been enlarged and greatly beautified, and at its side there has been erected a new city library; thus, the one with the old treasures carefully gathered by the great scholar, and the other, containing recent publications, stand within easy reach of one another.

The chief object of the Society Menéndez y Pelayo, as evidenced at its opening meeting, is to create at Santander a hearth, a *centro de estudios*, where students in history and letters may most profitably carry on their work by making use not only of the library now thrown open to specialists, but of the counsel and direction of the scholars connected with the association. It is the hope and desire of the society that teachers and students interested in the language, literature and history of Spain and of her former colonies, may take up their residence at Santander, and freely use the many precious books and manuscripts of Menéndez y Pelayo's library. Students, both native and foreign, are to be welcomed, and no matter in what particular Spanish field they wish to specialize, nor, on the other hand, how broad their taste may be, the library will be found to contain an unusual amount of material for every branch and every epoch of Spain's culture.

No brief statement can hope to give an adequate idea of the scope of Menéndez y Pelayo's collection. It is commensurate with his unparalleled learning and wide interests, for to him no period of Spanish history or literature was unknown; to him the great Spaniards of all times were familiar names. His library contains practically all of the material which formed the foundation of his

writings, and since his literary studies are replete with references to history and chronicle, the student interested in the political and economical story of Spain will find his needs satisfied no less than the specialist in her language and literature. Even Spain's earliest period is represented by rare manuscript chronicles, and much of the material is unknown and worthy of prompt publication. Outside of Spain, the library is very wealthy in the literature of the lands which were once her colonies, as may be inferred from Menéndez y Pelayo's remarkable *Historia de la Poesía hispano-americana*, in some ways the creation he himself prized the most. During many years he collected the works of the innumerable eminent writers whom he analyses in that comprehensive study, and his friends, knowing that he was engaged upon this task, frequently sent him copies of rare editions. Thus students especially interested in the writers of Spanish America will find ample material for their investigations.

The scope of this brief article hardly permits more than a mention of certain epoch-making publications by Menéndez y Pelayo, such as his *Antología de Poetas Líricos Castellanos*, in thirteen volumes, containing illuminating introductions on various periods or famous poets, as well as an invaluable study on Spanish ballads; or his *Orígenes de la Novela*, with the most ample survey hitherto attempted on the growth of Spanish fiction; or his unsurpassed studies of the *Comedias* of Lope de Vega, printed in the Academy's edition of that prolific playwright; or his capital *Historia de las Ideas Estéticas*, which has furnished material for many historians and critics since its first appearance. These and many other noteworthy creations give an idea not only of the vastness of his own labor, but reflect the richness of the library which enabled him to realize such gigantic undertakings. Moreover, almost every page written by Menéndez y Pelayo suggests further work to be done by students, who can thus find a constant guide and inspiration for original writing. No achievement could better represent the purpose of the new society in which the whole of young Spain is to be vitally interested, than the publication of articles and books inspired by the material to be found in the library of Menéndez y Pelayo.

For the study of the Spanish language this collection also offers every inducement, and it will no doubt become one of the chief aims of the society to combine with the opportunity of study in

the library such practical facilities as are necessary to acquire fluency in speaking Spanish. The highly efficient librarian, Señor Artigas and numerous scholars of Santander and Madrid connected with the society, will be ready at all times to give students practical help. Plans are also afoot to institute series of lectures or classes to be organized at such seasons as may be found most suitable for residence in Santander. Our American students will naturally ask, first of all, what facilities will be offered them by boarding-houses or private families in which they can pursue the practical study of Spanish by means of constant conversation, and especially by intimate relations with the Spanish people. When students begin to turn toward Santander as a hearth for Spanish studies, the question of boarding-houses and families will be eagerly taken up and satisfactorily solved, and American visitors especially can feel assured of the warmest welcome.

As regards Santander and the *Santanderinos*, a word on the charm of this beautiful city and the hospitality of its citizens must suffice. As a coast-town with a great harbor and traffic of increasing importance Santander has in recent years grown in size and beauty. A large factor in its prosperity has been the presence of the King, who makes Santander his residence for several months every summer; at that season the ocean, the beaches and the surrounding Cantabrian mountains offer a welcome change to the madrileños and other Spaniards who flee from the heat of Castile and Andalusia. Herein lies one of the great advantages of Santander over Madrid: its climate is not only mild and attractive for the greater part of the year, but also makes possible innumerable excursions through the ancient province of Asturias; so that the stranger may see many sights of great natural beauty, and seize the rare opportunity of visiting localities made famous in history, or recalled in ballad and epic poetry, in legend and folklore. It will suffice to recall a few names well known to every student of Spanish history, art, or letters. Among the many places that can be reached by train, or bicycle, or automobile (and not a few on foot) are Santillana, a remarkable mediaeval town with numerous ancient buildings quite intact, and a rare old church which is a precious example of early romanesque; the caverns of Altamira, most important in the study of the late Stone Age because of their extraordinary prehistoric sketches of animals; the highly picturesque seaport of San Vicente de la Barquera with ancient walls, bridges, and churches;

Llanes, a quaint and typical fishermen's town; or Covadonga, the so-called cradle of the Spanish monarchy, which is still visited today by many pilgrims who worship at the shrine in the cave that was supposed to shelter King Pelayo. Moreover, those who are fond of high-mountain climbing, will find both grandeur and exercise in an excursion to the famous Picos de Europa. Indeed, the student's program may be admirably arranged, permitting him to supplement play and work pursued at Santander by further studies at Madrid, and each sojourn can be planned for an appropriate season of the year.

The Society of Menéndez y Pelayo has an organ in the *Boletín de la Biblioteca de Menéndez y Pelayo*, published six times a year, and containing articles of a most varied character, calculated to awaken a wider interest in the work of the society and the opportunity offered by the library; it prints unedited texts besides original articles dealing with historical, literary and other matter. The membership fee of the society is twenty-five pesetas a year, and, no doubt, anyone planning to pursue his studies at Santander may find it helpful to become a member. It is gratuitous to add that women students will find the same opportunities offered to men, and the readers of *HISPANIA* may thus make known to specialists in the Spanish language, literature and history, that the new *Sociedad Menéndez y Pelayo* holds out every promise for successful work, for a profitable sojourn in one of the fairest provinces of the Peninsula, and for rare friendships with cultured Spaniards.

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